

Communication with Journalists as an aid to Information Management (Media Relations)

Introduction

Collaboration with journalists is a very important area of information management in an institution. A journalist usually represents a specific medium, but sometimes works independently or across several traditional or online media outlets at the same time. With the rise of social media and the changing ways of communicating information, the role of the journalist and journalism has changed significantly over the past two decades. What is known as the classic, older way of doing journalism may not be suitable for the younger part of the profession and vice-versa. Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers, who are familiar with the Internet and social media, may perceive the previous style of journalism as too distant.

Consequently, a participant in media processes encounters many types of approaches to the practice of the profession, many styles, many schools of journalism, and many types of media. The following article presents these themes in precisely this key: the constant change in the understanding and practice of the journalism profession in recent years, as well as the transformation of tools, the construction of information, content production, and editorial processes. Modern technologies imply modifications in the journalism profession all over the world. Understanding these differences is an important aid to substantive collaboration with journalists and the media. Moreover, the following article shall also outline practical rules for dealing with journalists.

The correct management of information supplied outside an organization favors the achievement of its objectives. Relations with the media, as they are defined, "(...) or so-called media relations, are the building and maintaining of good, positive and mutually beneficial relations of a company with the media."¹ Negative media relations, instead, can lead to situations that negatively influence an institution's image. Proper relationships and communication with the media by an organization lay the foundation for the process of communicating positive information to the company's target groups.

A correct relationship with the media means curating the right "temperature" of the message. Sometimes, thoughtful content will bring matters to a boiling point; other times, cold information is the most appropriate style. The person in charge of the temperature of media contacts is usually the press officer, assisted by the so-called press office. Therefore, it is extremely important to be professionally prepared to work with journalists representing different styles and forms.

Journalist and journalism

If you don't want to change the world, don't become a journalist. This is what Jane Reed, former editor, publisher, and director of corporate affairs at News International, had to say about journalists. Up until a few decades ago, the term journalist was used to describe a person who wrote articles for newspapers. Instead, in the second half of the 20th and early

¹ Julia Przyborowska, Magdalena Kurcz, Encyklopedia zarządzania, Media relations, https://mfiles.pl/pl/index.php/Media_relations.

21st centuries, followers of the profession began working in radio, television, and the Internet. One of the most popular descriptions defines journalists as "all media employees who have editorial responsibility for the preparation or transmission of news or other basic units of information. This definition includes those whose principal responsibilities are news gathering, drafting, and editing, or supervising and managing news operations."²

Journalists can be subdivided according to the sector they cover, for example: sports, religion, history, politics, technology, science, war, investigations. On the other hand, the way the profession is performed determines the qualitative characteristics: reporter, correspondent, commentator, presenter, mobile journalist, or columnist. Taking into account the medium for which the journalist works, a distinction can be made between TV, radio, print, Internet, and freelance journalists. Many representatives of this profession complete specific studies, courses, and training. In recent years, a figure has emerged that is defined a "content creator," often possessing a series of skills that, combined, produce the desired effect, but are not always satisfactory in terms of quality. The content creator is also repeatedly defined as a journalist.

In a description of the profession of a journalist, the following features are found: "A journalist participates in the process of social communication by publishing articles, reports, interviews, commentaries, feature columns in the mass media. She or he gathers and conveys information about interesting events, phenomena occurring in the contemporary world, as well as opinions and viewpoints of interest to the public. (...) A contemporary journalist must get to the facts skillfully and quickly. To do their job effectively, journalists maintain contact with popular personalities, decision-makers, or institutions in sociopolitical, economic, and cultural life. (...) Furthermore, the work of a journalist requires creativity, communication skills, dutifulness, persistence, and determination."³

A journalist must be guided by so-called journalistic ethics, which implies, among other things, respect for the truth and the public's right to information. He reports and interprets events honestly, strives to be accurate and independent, attributes information to reliable sources, uses honest means to obtain material, does not commit plagiarism, respects privacy. He seeks the truth, is courageous in gathering information, avoids stereotypes about race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, physical appearance, or social status, promotes the open exchange of ideas, gives voice to the voiceless, distinguishes news from advertising or publicity, shows compassion, admits mistakes and quickly corrects them.⁴

Walter Williams, in 1908, founded the world's first school of journalism at Mizzou, which is known today as the University of Missouri. Over a century later, his manifesto remains one of the clearest statements of principles, values, and standards for journalists all over the world. Williams wrote, "I believe that clear thinking and clear statement, accuracy and fairness are fundamental to good journalism. I believe that a journalist should write only what he holds in

² John W. C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski, William W. Bowman, *The news people: a sociological portrait of American journalists and their work*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1976, p. 7.

³ Dziennikarz, <http://wup.kielce.pl/images/stories/CIZ-zawody/dziennikarz.pdf>, 2018.

⁴ The Journalist's Resource, Leighton Walter Kille, Code of ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists, <https://journalistsresource.org/home/code-of-ethics/>, 2009.

his heart to be true."⁵ In many other newsrooms, too, among the rules of collaboration, one finds concrete, interesting codes of ethics and charters of the journalist's duties.⁶

The profession of journalism is linked to public trust. The information and reports obtained are often personal statements and opinions of individuals who represent the company. Maintaining truth and objectivity in the information produced is the foundation of journalistic activities, upon which the successive steps of the profession can be built. Modern technological means do not exempt from ethical principles, and media convergence - the interpenetration of multi-layered media content - encourages balanced actions linked to the truth of the message and the well-being of the individual and the company to which the content is directed.

Journalist and journalism in the 21st century - media convergence

Journalism is a creative profession. But today's journalism and the journalism of the past are two different worlds. "There is no doubt that the technological revolution, above all, its intensification over the last three decades, does not only affect journalists themselves as a profession - it is penetrating into the structures of social life much more profoundly, often revolutionizing the way and nature of communication among all contemporary mass media users."⁷ The Internet is transforming journalism into an increasingly digital form. Social media has, on the other hand, become so prevalent in the profession that working without it becomes inefficient. "Journalism cannot neglect social media, which often outpaces its competition, i.e., the large institutions and news agencies."⁸

Due to the continuous technological and therefore cultural changes, one can speak of so-called liquid journalism. This term refers to the one used by Zygmunt Bauman - liquid society - through which he describes the processes taking place in recent years. He defines a liquid modern society as "a society in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines."⁹ While a few decades ago journalism had well-defined rules, at the beginning of the 21st century, due to the changing ways of accessing information, these standards are rather uneven. It is these rapid changes in formats and tools, marked by media convergence, that can be defined as liquid.¹⁰

Media convergence is 'a phenomenon involving the combination of information and communication technologies, computer networks and media content. It unites the "three C's"

⁵ Missouri School of Journalism, University of Missouri, The Journalist's Creed, <https://journalism.missouri.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/journalists-creed-download.pdf>.

⁶ Ordine dei Giornalisti del Veneto, Consiglio Regionale, Vademecum del giornalista le leggi, le carte e le regole, <https://www.ordinegiornalisti.veneto.it/files/Scuola-Buzzati/vademecum%20edizione%20XX.pdf>, Venezia 2009.

⁷ Paweł Łokić, *Praktyki uprawiania zawodu dziennikarza w środowisku nowych mediów*, Rozprawa doktorska, Poznań 2019, p. 117.

⁸ Sergio Bolzoni, *Giornalismo digitale*, UTET, Novara 2015, p. 142.

⁹ Mark Deuze, *Journalism in Liquid Modern Times. An interview with Zygmunt Bauman*, *Journalism Studies* Vol. 8, August 2007, p. 672.

¹⁰ Mark Deuze, *Journalism in Liquid Modern Times. An interview with Zygmunt Bauman*, *Journalism Studies* Vol. 8, August 2007, p. 672.

- computing, communication, and content (as well as: content, corporations, computers) - and is a direct consequence of the digitization of media content and the spread of the Internet.¹¹ Thanks to the aforementioned phenomenon of liquid journalism and media convergence, the process of creating, editing and publishing information has changed significantly. Media convergence is gaining speed in the second decade of the 21st century. Modern journalism is becoming increasingly more rooted in social networks. Rapid access to information has revolutionized the need to be informed in society. A few decades ago, citizens could only keep up to date with information from the morning press or the evening news broadcast by few channels, but today the need to be informed can be satisfied every few seconds using the Internet.

Live broadcasting, or live streaming, is becoming increasingly popular in journalism. A distinction must be made between broadcasts produced with a large amount of equipment and personnel and those made with few resources. With the right skills and technology, a single person can broadcast extremely high-quality broadcasts with commentary simultaneous to traditional media. Small, high-quality equipment combined with a sufficiently fast Internet network can now supply professional live video and audio coverage from the very center of an event. This type of news coverage happens to be the most desired by viewers.

The authors of the publication "*Global Journalism Education in the 21st century: Challenges & Innovation*" talk about journalism education related to technological change. According to them, it is necessary to adapt to the ever-evolving environment and seek new forms of journalism education for young students.¹² The fundamentals of reliable journalism remain the same, while the new, often sophisticated forms of content creation and publishing are sometimes surprising. One example is the TikTok format, where recording and publishing video content in a 9:16 vertical format is preferred over 16:9 horizontal. Another example is film editing, which is much faster than it was a dozen years ago, or recording video content using previously unknown devices, such as drones.

Media convergence is a popular phenomenon that brings new developments every year thanks to technological revolutions. Journalism has become "fast," not only in terms of prepared material, but also in terms of content dissemination. A medium such as Twitter, for example, is capable of sharing information to virtually the entire world in a few minutes. This is due to the specifics of the medium and the number of recipients who receive the relevant information in real-time. This is why it is so important to be adequately prepared and educated to publish and consume content in a world of media convergence.

Practical rules for dealing with journalists

Taking into account the evolution of journalistic style, convergence, and liquidity in the media field, and the ethics of work in the media, several practical principles of media relations will be outlined descriptively below. By no means do they claim to become recipes for successful communication, but they may certainly help with information management in institutions.

¹¹ Media convergence, Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/media-convergence>.

¹² Robyn Goodman, Elanie Steyn (Editors), *Global journalism education in the 21st century: Challenges and innovations*. Austin, TX: Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, 2017, Introduction; p. 1-3.

Adherence to these principles will guarantee greater effectiveness of the activities undertaken.

Respect all journalists

In his or her work with the media, the media relations manager encounters journalists from younger and older generations, those who feel at home on social media, but also those for whom the Internet remains a highly modernly designed room. There are quick-information-oriented journalists and those who need time and meetings to prepare a statement or an interview. Some have a professional command of their native language; others do not have this ability. Some work on Church-related topics, while others prefer politics, economics, or fashion. Respect and personal culture are due to everyone, regardless of the topic covered and the emotional charge related to the content created.

One of the fundamental rules is to answer e-mails, phone calls, and messages from journalists. If this action is neglected or ignored, media professionals shall quickly realize the lack of professionalism on the other side. One should always respond to journalists' inquiries for information. Sometimes the institution's policy does not allow certain responses, but it is, nonetheless, necessary to give feedback or provide a specific statement. There are no out-of-the-box words or statements when dealing with the media. It is good media practice that always, at any moment, the spokesperson or person responsible for the institution's media coverage may be recorded, even when the red light is off. In times of crisis, it is important to remember that even the worst truth is better than a lie. Delayed and postponed communication undermine the processes of an institution's information management.

Gen Z journalists tend to be more sensitive to certain topics, such as ecology, migration, or transparency in institutions. They are familiar with social media and applications that support journalistic work, artificial intelligence, and individual and team project management tools. Often their main work tool is a smartphone or iPhone, along with a number of other so-called gadgets.

Building good relationships with journalists

The better the relationship with the journalist, the greater the chances of success of the media activities. Friendly, open, and sincere interpersonal relationships foster the information flow management processes of institutions. Nothing can replace a face-to-face meeting with a journalist. Care must be taken to maintain regular contact, but avoid being intrusive. Professionalism and friendliness, good manners, are the qualities of a media relations person. It is advisable to go to personal meetings with the media directors, but only for important matters or at the beginning of a promising collaboration. It is also important to remember that a journalist is a human being who is accountable for his or her work and must attain the desired results. They should always be thanked for even the smallest publication on the institution they represent.

Working with journalists requires skillful monitoring of their activities to achieve planned objectives. Sending a single article can sometimes be insufficient. Hence the importance of the follow-up, that is, elegantly reminding and offering additional media content to the

publication. It is not appropriate to request the withdrawal of uncomfortable content from the publication, content that does not match the image of the institution. Effective follow-up must be used in a polished form that shows no signs of a de facto need or demand.

A database of journalists is crucial in media relations activities. Depending on the institution represented, this may include journalists working in local, national, or international media. It is worthwhile selecting the right media to work with and finding out how they operate. A capable media relations manager knows the media environment of the institution he or she represents and then looks for the right collaborators to publicize his or her organization's content.

The new generation of journalists highly appreciates the comments, the likes, and sharing of content posted on social media. Young journalists often post photo and video content about themselves and their work online, which can be helpful in learning about their way of doing journalism and about their interests. Some become influencers with a significant number of subscribers or followers, influencing large social groups. Young journalists often speak foreign languages well and are familiar with the world.

Building media literacy

Ensuring one has proper training in copywriting, appearing before a camera, choosing suitable attire, and many other areas are fundamental. In particular, one must be prepared for public speaking on camera, whether for short speeches or live public debates. The most important thing is the content of the message - and this must be taken care of first of all - but the way one speaks and, above all, one's appearance is also important. Working on the appropriate language of the speech, more on the positive and figurative and less on the professional, could be a highly desirable trait. Being prepared for an interview or debate in front of cameras or radio will be quickly appreciated. Integrity and professionalism are the hallmarks of a media relations specialist. Skill and competence in providing media coverage in crisis situations are also important.

When presenting oneself to the media, attention should be paid to one's clothes and appearance, making sure they are appropriate. The audience first pays attention to a person's appearance and manner of speech, and only later does the factual message reach them. Appropriate gestures support, or aid, the message, while so-called closed gestures can completely negate the factual content. Punctuality, especially at live events, is a quality appreciated by media professionals, as is neat and clean attire. Wanting to instruct technical staff is, instead, bound to fail. As for written content provided to the media, it should be checked by another person before being sent to journalists. In crisis situations, when writing a statement, be aware that every single word is important.

Attention should be paid to fostering media-related skills as regard the use of modern equipment, social media, and the ability to discuss and respond to comments on social media. In many cases, recording video and audio with a phone may be the only convenient solution. Preliminary equipment preparation and technical skills can thus be a good basis for a concrete message.

Many times, journalists ask to record, speak, or participate in a live discussion remotely, using the appropriate tools and the Internet. If he or she is likely to be filmed often, a suitable place at home or work, a so-called mini-studio, ought to be prepared. A good phone or camera for recording, a microphone, a light, appropriate clothing, makeup, and a suitable background should be provided.

Providing the right content

Journalists today often expect ready-made content in the form of text or video. Sending poor-quality material is unwelcome. It is a mistake to send material completely unrelated to the journalist's profile and interests or to organize meetings with the media with little thematic relevance. In a word, attention should be paid to the selection of the information provided. Journalists appreciate stimulating topics and material that rouses emotions in the audience. Simple and brief press releases will encourage journalists to read them and transform them into relevant news. Moreover, no effort should be spared to help journalists find the right people or experts for an interview, conversation, television appearance, or quick on-camera meetings.

The structures of modern newsrooms are very different from those of a dozen years ago. Often the work is done remotely. Content creators working in the field deliver the completed material, developed through a post-production process, many times from home, in remote. These journalists often ask others to provide audio or video content appropriate to the production of their material. In some cases, the speed and originality of the material provided will be far more important than the quality of the footage. Immediate contents from the scene sometimes prove to be invaluable in journalistic work.

Journalists of the younger generation are sometimes involved in live broadcasts from the actual scene to social media, adding their commentary. In these cases, it is necessary to provide them with the right conditions to carry out their work, sometimes related to needs such as access to electricity, the internet, and people who can comment live on the broadcast event. Nowadays, the speed of news coverage is extremely important.

Conclusion

Working with journalists thus presupposes adequate processes that lead to the correct management of information. Media relations have become part of the structures of small and large organizations seeking an answer to the question: how to communicate well with journalists and the media. In the era of rapidly evolving journalism and new communication technologies, this question remains of constant importance. Ongoing, continuous education in this field is a prerequisite for anyone working in this sector, to do work that is fruitful, effective.

Communication professionals notice that changes in technology lead to changes in communication. What is defined as the "classic" way of communication may not be sufficient to manage information processes effectively. Changes in communication force parallel cultural changes, as do those in the journalism profession. The Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation, Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, mentions these transformations in the reading of

reality: "We must practice a believing reading of reality that includes others, promoting dialogue with others, with culture, with the media, with intellectuals, with those who think differently and even in opposition to us. These are the virtuous habits that our way of being in the world requires, the *Christian* and *Salesian style* that we can bring to the vision of the world and of things."¹³

Many years ago, St. John Bosco spoke about the importance of media coverage, about how important it was for the activities of the Salesian Family to have visibility in the media. "We are in times when we need to do, operate. The world has become material, why one has to work and make known the good one does. If one also works miracles by praying day and night while staying in his cell, the world doesn't pay attention to it and doesn't believe it anymore. The world needs to see and touch."¹⁴ In this way, Don Bosco spoke of the need for various forms of publicity and promotion in the press of his time. Probably, in the context of his time, he was, indeed, an effective specialist in media relations.

Media relations in the Salesian Family is an important aspect of work in many institutions. Contacts with journalists from older and younger generations bring real benefits in the field of promoting organizations related to the Salesian charism. Professional management of the circulation of information fosters good relations with media from different sectors, while knowledge of practical rules relating to contacts with journalists provides the basis for creating responsible content.

¹³ Ángel Fernández Artime SDB, Rettor Maggiore, Strenna 2023, Come lievito nella famiglia umana d'oggi. La dimensione laicale della Famiglia di Don Bosco.

¹⁴ Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco XIII, p. 126-127.

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